

FORECAST AND REVIEW

WINTER MUSIC — NEW YORK, 1933

CONTINUED mulling over remembrances of premieres past awakens almost no spark of warmth. Given the nature of most of the works heard in New York this winter, the situation becomes ironic, for no emotional appeal was neglected by our composers. We had "Prophecies," "Rhapsodies," Symphonies ("Romantic" and otherwise). Nor was the exotic eschewed. We had glimpses into strange lands where chemical poems for forty-one percussion instruments and tone poems for eleven flutes were to make us feel a *frisson nouveau*. Even the platonic was made accessible to us (musically, that is) by choral offerings supposed to represent "Spiritual Love." And to touch in some mysterious way our sense of pathos, the fairest of our youth did leave the havens of their respective mother-foundations. But everything seemed to have encountered in the labyrinthine ways of our New York a raging monster of Ennui. And somehow, almost everybody succumbed to this modern Minotaur. If ever we needed a Theseus, it is now. Nothing less than the advent of some such authentic hero will end these ravages of Ennui.

The first victim to our yawning monster was Prokofieff with an orchestral suite rehashed from an opera *The Gambler* (at the Philharmonic, Walter conducting). As such it hardly justified its existence. In reworking the original matter the suite attained no striking degree of clarity and fusion, and in comparison with his third *Piano Concerto*, superbly rendered by the composer on the same occasion, it was shoddy stuff. If Prokofieff's work failed to maintain one's interest, it was mainly because the insufficient organization of his material spoiled

its latent interest. One got the same impression from Richard Donovan's *Sextet for Woodwinds and Piano* (at the Pan-American). Its material, though abundant and individual in cast, seemed too loosely strung together. We offer this as an impression only. The distinctly inadequate performance of Donovan's work made it impossible to judge accurately. Under the same category, that is, of works inherently musical but failing in effect because of faulty organization, would come Mossolow's *String Quartet*. In mood and detail it had considerable freshness, but once again a certain incoherence, a getting-out-of-hand-ness proved fatal to its cumulative effect.

Under a second category would come Louis Gruenberg's *First Symphony* (by the Boston Symphony), Chavez' *Piano Sonata* (Pan-American), Roy Harris' *Fantasy for Woodwinds and Piano* (by the Sinfonietta of New York) and Henry Brant's *Concerto for Eleven Flutes* (at the Pan-American). To explain the nature of this category would require an extensive digression into technical grounds, but we shall try to indicate in a few words the view-point involved.

A work of any considerable length implies a structure. This structure we may define as a cumulative interrelation of clearly defined forces. The powerful interlocking of *differentiated* parts that go to make up a whole depends in turn upon the precision with which the *spanning* of the melodic forces from point to point is accomplished. It is this series of spans that gives a work real contour and solidity. If we claim for the idea of the span a role of overwhelming importance it is from no purely theoretical standpoint. A penetrating analysis of Beethoven's last quartets should convince anyone of that.

If we approach each of the works mentioned above in the light of this concept it should clarify their effect on us considerably. We can understand why Brant's *Concerto*, in its course, became increasingly irritating to follow. It was simply the lack of any articulatedness in the spanning of his melodic lines, their directionless convolutions that made it impossible to listen for any length of time.

In the Chavez sonata a sense of line marvelously clean and vital is present at the openings of the first and last movements.

The rest of the time the dynamism of the rhythm he has set up gets out of his grip and proceeds to chug-chug all over the keyboard like a motor-boat out of control. At such times the music loses all sense of conciseness (except in sonority). The spanning points for his lines become non-existent. As a result the *Sonata* invariably misses its effect in performance. That a firm leading of the melodic lines would enhance his originality and not impair it is evident from the fact that Chavez's most personal and forceful pages are those where clarity and direction are preserved.

Roy Harris' *Fantasy* offers an interesting slant on the case in point. This work gave the effect (an effect that Harris undoubtedly intended) of one melodic span from beginning to end. This is at once its virtue and its weakness. Its virtue, because the unending flow of the melodic line seemed to be a poetic transcription of undulating limitless Western scenes; its weakness, because the ear needs a more cadentially defined line if it is to follow its course with perfect comprehension. In Louis Gruenberg's *Symphony* the points of his melodic spans were always firmly kept in view. Throughout this brilliantly colored work there was no sign of any fumbling or lack of control. If the symphony was not entirely successful it was because a certain prolixity and lack of coordination between the various emotional implications of each spanning force ended by fatiguing us.

To oppose the cerebrality of the neoclassic school today Howard Hanson wrote a neoromantic *Symphony*--and thereby committed exactly the same error. May we quote from Ramon Fernandez to characterize this error? "The great weakness of the neoclassicists proceeds from their thinking they'll *feel* only that which has *already been understood*. That way is not the process of the classic spirit, which is the accession to the intelligence of a *new sum of sensibility*." Now this is exactly what Mr. Hanson has committed. He has limited himself to feeling only that which has already been understood and felt. If the lack of a new sum of sensibility is fatal even to a supposedly classic work, by how much more is this same lack fatal to a supposedly romantic one?

In one other instance, located at the very Antipodes to Mr. Hanson's music, let us point out another such discrepancy between the pretension and the actual approach. This time it concerns M. Varese and his *Ionization* for forty-one percussion instruments. We have nothing against the percussion. Though wholly confined to them, a rhythmically vital continuity may make itself articulate. They are even articulate enough to betray a fundamental insecurity and vagueness in their handling just as surely as a string quartet will. What we mean to say is that once more the basic impressionism of Varese's method showed up glaringly against its modernistic pretensions; its entire dependence on "effect," its lack of any instinct for real rhythmic expansion placing it where it really belongs: *Au Bord de l'Eau* in the late 1890's.

Israel Citkowitz

FALSE DAWN FOR THE DANCE

THE special kind of millenium the dance has always waited for seemed to have become an actuality early this season. Martha Graham was dancing with her group at Radio City. Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman were composing and dancing for the revue *Americana*. Agnes de Mille was doing the dances for *Flying Colors*. Hurok, who now has three dancers, one waned, one waning, and one in the ascendant, projected a "festival" with Wigman, Escudero and Uday Shan-kar.

Now all this is over, and the net result is not much. We have learned that Graham is more adaptable than she has been given credit for; that Humphrey and Weidman, almost through their sole efforts, can elevate a revue into something worth seeing; that Wigman brings to totality the eclipse she started last year; and that we can confirm some already fairly solid suspicions about Roxy. Not very important things, any of them. Or only important in so far as they defer the millenium to a future date.

This should be discouraging, yet there have been incidents of this theatrical outburst and one or two recitals that demand mention. For one thing, Martha Graham, with her group work *Ceremonials* of last year, appears to have swallowed her Indian inspiration in a generous gulp and put it behind her—not for-